

Pemberton Hill Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan (SNAP)

Overview

Pemberton Hill has experienced many unique challenges that have impacted its development character, economy, and social fabric. Still, the neighborhood provides a wealth of opportunities for housing, business, education, and recreation within a relatively small area. As it transforms, the primarily residential neighborhood has been experiencing challenges that may undermine its livability. In response to these challenges, the City of Dallas has demonstrated extraordinary foresight in initiating a planning process to look at short-term and long-term strategies for revitalizing the neighborhood. Under the direction of the Deputy Mayor Pro Tem Erik Wilson and Councilmember Rickey Callahan, the Planning and Urban Design Department is developing a Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan (SNAP), built around a community-based process that reflects the interests and needs of residents and other stakeholders.

The purpose of the Pemberton Hill SNAP is to call attention to the elements of the neighborhood in need of improvement, and to reaffirm the commitment of the city and residents to the neighborhood. The SNAP focuses on identifying actions that will encourage long-term sustainability and enhance the neighborhood. Since the health of the neighborhood will depend on how well its livability, character, appearance and economic vitality is maintained or improved, the SNAP primarily focuses on key issues like neighborhood upkeep and property maintenance, public safety, infrastructure improvement, and economic development. It also takes a critical look at improving city services, transportation and circulation, support for businesses, education attainment and workforce development for the community with very high unemployment rate and where many residents are foreign-born and struggle with English.

Planning Process

The planning process consists of four main phases. Currently, the first and second phases have been completed and the third phase is in progress. The first phase focused on assessing the existing conditions in the neighborhood, including analyses of the demographic, socio-economic, and real property data. It also looked at the delivery of city services and programs in the neighborhood. The second phase consisted of a stakeholder and public engagement process to determine the community vision, interests, concerns and priorities. In this phase, resident's ideas for improving the neighborhood were compiled and vetted by the Advisory Council, Councilmembers and city staff. Third, a comprehensive list of short-term revitalization action steps and long-term transformational strategies, based on community input is being prepared, which will guide decision making on capital improvement program and future investments in the community. These revitalization strategies will be focused on improving the quality of life of residents and making city regulations more user-friendly for home owners, renters, landlords and local businesses. Finally, the fourth phase will consist of drafting an action plan - a Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan - that will be presented to the community for review and approval. The entire planning process is supposed to last approximately 6-8 months and is expected to wrap up in December, 2016.

Public Engagement

Community engagement—particularly for traditionally underrepresented populations—is an important element of neighborhood planning. Pemberton Hill residents have had, and will continue to have, several opportunities to participate in the development of the plan. To give residents and other stakeholders a voice in the development of this plan, the City has deployed different outreach tools and strategies to better understand and address the needs of the community. These include one-on-one meetings/phone interviews with key stakeholders, a project website (<http://dallascityhall.com/departments/pnv/Pages/PembertonHill.aspx>), community surveys and a series of community meetings to get residents' input. City staff have also focused on meeting with key stakeholders like representatives of local churches and businesses to incorporate their ideas and concerns in the plan.

The public engagement process began with a kickoff meeting for the Advisory Council on June 21, 2016, in which members discussed the planning process, project timeline, and expected deliverables. City staff also presented information about the existing conditions in the neighborhood. The first community meeting was held on June 30, 2016 at the Janie C Turner Recreation Center to identify community assets and challenges, discuss community vision and prioritize issues on which the SNAP should focus on. A second community meeting was held on July 28, 2016 with the Hispanic residents of Pemberton Hill to discuss their vision for the community and also talk about their concerns. A third community meeting was held on August 4, 2016 at the Texas Horse Park to report back on the vision statements and comments received from residents, so that the community could have an opportunity to review them. At that meeting, staff gathered more detailed input from residents and also engaged them in identifying short-term and long term revitalization strategies, which are guiding the development of the plan.

Proposed Plan Recommendations

This section highlights potential recommendations of the plan based on the key issues identified by the community through the public engagement phase. The recommendations are derived from the findings of existing issues, challenges, and opportunities in the neighborhood. The list is not exclusive and is only meant to start the conversation about finding solutions to issues. Among the key issues that the action plan will be making recommendations on include:

1. **Neighborhood Upkeep and Property Maintenance:** The most frequently raised issue by residents was the appearance of certain properties within the neighborhood. A number of properties in the neighborhood are not adequately maintained, ranging from garbage not being picked up to structures needing major improvements. There are also broken sidewalks that are in need of repairs. The lack of maintenance and litter removal might be contributing to the negative image of the neighborhood and its apparent deterioration. Recommended strategies to improve neighborhood appearance can be spearheaded from both the neighborhood and City levels:

Neighborhood Efforts

- Establish a neighborhood leadership task force, consisting of interested property owners and residents, to provide ongoing guidance for neighborhood improvement
- Encourage “peer pressure” by residents to encourage neighbors to take responsibility for maintenance of their properties
- Increase awareness of home repair/property rehabilitation programs
- Establish a “Good Neighbor” program by encouraging residents to get to know other neighborhood residents and open channels for friendly communications, particularly for sharing expectations for property maintenance, noise etc.
- Designate a “Neighborhood Ombudsman” to serve as contact and resource person for neighborhood upkeep issues
- Establish neighborhood watch, with assistance of the DPD, to encourage residents to be mindful of what is happening in the neighborhood and serve as a mechanism for observing and reporting suspicious behavior
- Develop a program to encourage painting of existing homes (already being implemented), partnering with home improvement stores for donations or reduced prices on painting supplies to be used to paint houses for the disabled and seniors, with the aim of improving the exterior appearances of properties in the neighborhood
- Implement “Adopt a Trash Can” program by providing public trash receptacles along primary pedestrian paths in the neighborhood for public use

City-Led Efforts

- Conduct code crawls/code assessment walk-through, which can be combined with a “spring clean-up/fix-up” message. Neighborhood code officers and volunteer residents can patrol the neighborhood to identify appropriate maintenance projects that property owners should undertake. *(Planned for October 1, 2016)*
- Host a “Property Maintenance” workshop in which the neighborhood association, property owners, renters and City staff (Neighborhood code compliance officers and housing inspectors and the community prosecutor) can discuss property maintenance, applicable codes and other strategies affecting appearance of the neighborhood. The workshop would provide an efficient and effective forum for disseminating information and for discussing shared property maintenance questions and concerns. *(Plans are underway to host the workshop in November 19, 2016)*

- Consider increasing penalties for work performed without building permits
 - Develop a “Homeowner’s Handbook” to serve as a resource for owners interested in maintaining/improving their properties
 - Sign the entrances to Pemberton Hill to help communicate the identity of the neighborhood to visitors and residents; establishing the neighborhood as a special place worthy of distinction.
 - Budget for matching funds for sidewalk replacement for the neighborhood. The official City’s sidewalk replacement programs always has limited funds, which runs out fast. Request that in the coming budget years, the City earmark sidewalk replacement funds specifically for the Pemberton Hill neighborhood.
 - Encourage increased owner-occupancy of residential structures. Owner-occupied homes tend to be better maintained. Increasing home ownership in the neighborhood, through such tools as CDBG program, would have a net positive effect on neighborhood appearance
2. **Public Safety:** Make public spaces, such as sidewalks and playfields, more attractive, lively and well-lit to deter crime; improve relations between the community and police so that residents can feel comfortable reporting crime. Work with the police, code officers, community prosecutor, neighborhood association and community leaders to address crime including gang activities, drug houses, robberies and drug use/sale in the neighborhood.
 3. **Infrastructure Improvement:** identify key infrastructure improvements that are necessary in Pemberton Hill and develop a finite list of feasible infrastructure projects, which should be integrated into the neighborhood’s Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). This list should define the priority for investing in infrastructure improvements.
 4. **Flooding Prevention and Mitigation:** Minimize flooding in the neighborhood by working with city engineers from Public Works and Trinity Watershed Management to create a storm water management plan for the neighborhood, with a priority focus on minimizing flooding impacts to residential structures.
 5. **Economic Development:** The provision of goods, services, employment and amenities within a neighborhood is important for its viability and desirability. Focus on attracting a mix of businesses and employment opportunities, prioritizing those that are needed most by the community including quality grocery stores and restaurants that serve healthy food options. Build training and networking opportunities for local small business owners; designate neighborhood commercial/retail districts through a re-zoning process and partner with the City’s Office of Economic Development to market existing development and redevelopment opportunities in the neighborhood for commercial use. Newly developed commercial uses should be clean, safe and of high-quality construction and designed with well-maintained landscaping and appearances; prioritize the redevelopment of outdated or underutilized commercial buildings in the neighborhood to strengthen local tax base by providing goods and services locally.

6. **Education and Workforce Development:** Educational attainment levels in Pemberton Hill is very low compared to the City average. Develop strategies to support parents in navigating and engaging with the public school system; assess the need for a high school in the neighborhood; increase vocational and ESL training opportunities in the community, through partnership with local institutions like churches, schools and the community center.
7. **Transportation and Circulation:** Increase and beautify transit infrastructure; install bike lanes and bike racks; assess parking needs at public facilities such as the recreation center; and improve pedestrian safety at major intersections. CF Hawn Expressway (SH- 175) is a barrier to accessing Lake June DART station and the Pleasant Grove neighborhood, which has many resources (amenities & facilities) that Pemberton Hill residents need. Improve connectivity to the Pleasant Grove neighborhood and the train station by constructing a pedestrian bridge over CF Hawn expressway; Work with DART to install bus shelters in strategic locations, such as across from the Texas Horse Park on Pemberton Hill Road.
8. **Community History and Identity:** Pemberton Hill has a rich history and unique identity which should be preserved, documented, and celebrated. Develop a strategy for promoting the identity of the neighborhood and preserve its unique character through installation of gateway signs, compiling a written history of the community and preserving important historical structures and natural features; seek landmark designation for significant features, as was the case with the Big Spring.
9. **Vacant Lots:** Pemberton Hill has very many vacant lots, most of which are never properly maintained; they should be put to productive use, according to their location. Consider development uses for the many vacant lots in and adjacent to the neighborhood; proactively put vacant properties to productive interim use through such initiatives as community gardens and pop-up farmers market.
10. **Long-term Capacity Building:** Develop a plan to continually solicit participation from community residents and stakeholders; cultivate the next generation of community leaders. Support existing neighborhood groups like the recently registered Pemberton-Trinity Forest Neighborhood Association (PTFNA) by providing them with resources to build their long-term capacity to take ownership of neighborhood improvement and articulate neighborhood issues. Support crime watch groups and start a *Neighborhood Watch* to track and report criminal activities in the neighborhood.